In like vein, I found the coverage of the advocacy role (pages 112–113, 169–170) disappointing since hefty objections to it do exist in the nursing literature. In addition, the consideration of the pros and cons of advance directives (pages 220–221) could be criticised for a legal bias with the moral (and underpinning philosophical) difficulties disappearing from view. Generally though, the balance between the legal and moral commentary is well sustained. Indeed, the above remarks turn out to be rather minor objections to what I consider to be a most informative and readable book for nurses.

It should be noted that the accuracy of the legal material in the book and the credibility of the legal opinions expressed have to be taken on trust as the reviewer has no legal expertise.

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Ethical foundations of health care. Responsibilities in decision making

Jane Singleton and Susan McLaren, London, Mosby, 1995, 202 pages, £9.95 pb.

This book provides a useful addition to existing texts for health professionals on ethical theory and contemporary health care dilemmas. The greatest strength of the book is its careful structure, which makes it ideally suited to becoming a reference text for student and teacher alike.

Written jointly by a philosopher and a nurse the book enjoys the strength of both perspectives. The volume is divided into two sections. The first explores philosophical frameworks in some detail and the second examines contemporary health care dilemmas.

As might be expected, consequentialist and deontological theories are introduced and the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice discussed in the first part of the book. The debate benefits from quotations from primary sources, allowing the reader to capture something of the flavour of the original. The exposition is clear but will take the reader beyond mere introduction to address some complex issues of interest.

The second part of the book reviews questions of life and death, confidentiality, informed consent, truth-telling and health care research. In addition there are some wideranging discussions of contemporary relevance such as access to health care, professional codes of conduct and consumer perspectives. One disappointing omission from the text is any discussion of the ethical issues raised by health promotion. With the exception of a brief reference to paternalism in primary prevention this burgeoning area was left largely unexplored. Given the current emphasis upon health promotion in many curricula for health professionals, including Project 2000 for nursing students, this oversight will need addressing in future editions.

Each chapter of the book begins with some learning outcomes which usefully focus the mind. Clear headings and subheadings enhance the book's value as a teaching tool, as does the numbering system which facilitates cross-referral. Each chapter similarly concludes with some learning exercises, many of which would translate directly into discussion topics or assignment titles for students. In addition there are some useful further reading lists and a summary of key points. The book concludes with some well chosen appendices, including the professional codes or rules for physiotherapists, occupational therapists and nurses.

Two chapters stand out as being of particular value: chapter three, which addresses the question of what critical ethics can achieve and chapter eight where this is re-visited, with a case study of euthanasia. These will be of particular use with enquiring students who may question the value of the whole critical ethics 'enterprise'.

Ethical Foundations of Health Care merits a place in the library of undergraduate and postgraduate students of health care who have an interest in ethics and who seek a well constructed guide to the subject.

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The family in the age of biotechnology

Edited by Carole Ulanowski, Aldershot, Avebury, 1995, 161 pages, £32.50 hc.

There is, no doubt, something to be said for philosophy applied to practical affairs, provided that the philosophy be good and that the issues be worth addressing and credibly addressed. Neither qualification is evident everywhere in this collection of papers read at a conference of the Society for Applied Philosophy. Indeed the chapter closest to reality was written, not out of the literature of adversarial ideology, but out of the experience of a social worker with children assigned to foster or adopting parents by order of a court. The papers are exercises in social theorizing; they do not address the ethics of medical practice.

The papers fall roughly into three groups. The first speculates on concepts of family relationship arising from assisted reproduction technology (ART), as regulated, in Britain, by the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority. (Editors should get their facts right: the HFEA was established under the statute of 1990, not in the 1980s, when regulation was undertaken by the Voluntary (Interim) Licensing Authority.) Almond, in conscious difference from most other contributors, defends family bonds as the cement of social existence, not subject to construction and destruction by fragile and volatile individual choice. Legal and social acceptance of the 'fractionalization' now read into families formed by ART should await experience and reflection on it. Cole has his own view of the legal controls for ART already in place: they purport to protect the welfare of children; in fact their aim is reactionary, to protect the traditional or 'moral' family and to preserve the privileged and powerful position of men within it.

The second group of chapters meets the Editor's call for 'reflective space' on the family. Thomasson would prefer 'a non-biological ectogenic form of parenting' to nurture in a biological unit. In such a 'networked' family the wise child would not want to know her father; it won't matter. Leighton, with his social worker's knowledge of children, would differ: children, in order to develop their sense of self, need an identifiable human beginning and a family relationally based on integrity, trust and openness. There is no place for the pretence that a bio-engineered child is the natural child of its pseudo-parents.

In the third group, on marriage, Wilkinson and Gregory chase the same hare. Wilkinson asks whether